

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O R 021015Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3967

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 0548

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR AG MO SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA: ATHERTON/BENHABYLES CONVERSION

1. DURING DISCUSSION ON SAHARA WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY
ATHERTON MARCH 1, FOREIGN MINISTRY SECY GEN BENHABYLES
MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. MOROCCO HAS ATTEMPTED TO MAKE USE OF TRIBAL
ASSEMBLYX (JEMAA), AS MEANS OF LEGITIMIZING ITS FAIT
ACCOMPLI IN SAHARA. JEMAA WAS CREATED IN 1968 AS
INSTRUMENT OF SPANISH POLICY. AT PRESENT, BODY HAS NO
STANDING SINCE 67 OF ITS 102 MEMBERS FLED SAHARA AND
DECLARED JEMAA DISSOLVED. IMPOSSIBLE, THEREFORE, FOR
MOROCCANS TO USE JEMAA TO RATIFY MADRID DECLARATION.
BOTH UNSYG AND SPANISH UNHAPPY AT THIS MOROCCAN MOVE.

B. ALGERIA SEES SAHARA AS LOCAL, NOT INTERNATIONAL,
PROBLEM. OBSERVERS SHOULD NOT ALLOW THEIR THINKING
VIS-A-VIS ISSUE TO BE SHAPED BY IDEOLOGICAL PRONOUNCEMENTS
IN ALGERIAN MEDIA WHICH ATTEMPT TO PORTRAY ISSUE AS
INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLE.

C. NOW SAHARA ISSUE SEEMS TO BE HAVING CERTAIN
EFFECT ON BILATERAL U.S./ALGERIAN RELATIONS. IT MUST
BE EMPHASIZED THAT , IN PURELY BILATERAL DOMAIN,
THERE HAS BEEN UNTIL NOW NOTHING BUT COOPERATION BETWEEN
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U.S. AND ALGERIA. TWO COUNTRIES HAVE HAD THEIR

DIFFERENCES ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES--MIDDLE EAST AND ANGOLA ARE EXAMPLES--BUT THESE STEM FROM DIFFERING CONCEPTIONS OF WORLD ORDER. THERE IS ALSO TENDENCY FOR U.S. TO BE BLAMED WHENEVER DIFFICULT INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM ARISES. AT SAME TIME, THERE HAVE BEEN CERTAIN EVENTS SUCH AS ANNOUNCEMENTS OF MOROCCAN WEAPONS PURCHASES FROM U.S. AND VISIT TO MOROCCO BY 6TH FLEET COMMANDER, THAT WOULD SUGGEST TO OBSERVERS U.S. COMMITMENT TO MOROCCAN POSITION. MOROCCANS, THROUGH THEIR PRESS, HAVE SOUGHT TO BOLSTER THIS IMPRESSION AND TO MAKE IT APPEAR U.S. SUPPORTING THEM.

D. THERE IS NO INVOLVEMENT OF CUBANS, NORTH VIETNAMESE OR SOVIET WEAPONS IN SAHARA. HOWEVER, "WHEN SUCH THINGS ARE SUGGESTED, THEY HAVE WAY OF HAPPENING." (BENHABYLES DID NOT ELABORATE ON THIS ELLIPTICAL STATEMENT.)

E. MOROCCANS NOW IN DIFFICULT POSITION IN WHICH THEY HAVE TAKEN ACTION THAT RUNS COUNTER TO CERTAIN PRINCIPLES, AMONG THEM THAT OF NON-VIOLATION OF (AFRICAN) FRONTIERS. SOLUTION TO PROBLEM WHICH WILL STOP KILLING OF SAHRAOUI MUST BE FOUND THROUGH INTERNATIONAL MEANS. GIVEN VASTNESS OF TERRITORY AND SMALL NUMBER OF PEOPLE, MILITARY SOLUTION CLEARLY NOT POSSIBLE.

F. SOME HAVE TRIED TO SUGGEST THAT SAHARA PROBLEM IS BETWEEN ALGERIA AND MOROCCO. THIS IS NOT CASE. (BENHABYLES LEFT UNSTATED ALGERIAN CONTENTION THAT PROBLEM IS BETWEEN MOROCCAN AND SAHRAOUI.)

W. DURING COURSE OF CONVERSATION, ATHERTON MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. U.S. WOULD REGRET DEEPLY WERE SAHARA PROBLEM TO AFFECT BILATERAL AMERICAN/ALGERIAN RELATIONS.

B. U.S. SEES SAHARA PROBLEM SO FAR AS PURELY LOCAL, NOT INTERNATIONAL.

C. U.S. HAS NOT INTENTION OF INJECTING ITSELF INTO THIS REGIONAL MATTER EITHER THROUGH MEDIATION OR ANY OTHER MEANS.

D. U.S. HAD HOPED THAT EFFORTS OF SOME COUNTRIES OF REGION, AND OF AMBASSADOR RYDBECK, TO FIND CONFIDENTIAL

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SOLUTION TO PROBLEM WOULD ACHIEVE POSITIVE RESULTS.

E. "CERTAIN RELATIONSHIP" EXISTS AND WILL CONTINUE BETWEEN U.S. AND MOROCCO. HOWEVER, SIMILAR RELATIONS WHICH U.S. HAS WITH MANY COUNTRIES IN WOULD DO NOT MEAN THAT POLICIES OF THESE COUNTRIES ARE MADE IN WASHINGTON, AND MOROCCO IS NO EXCEPTION TO THIS RULE. U.S. HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF GREEN MARCH OR OF MADRID DECLARATION, FOR EXAMPLE. U.S. WAS AWARE THAT

NEGOTIATIONS WERE GOING ON IN MADRID IN MID-NOVEMBER
BUT WAS NOT PRIVY TO THEM IN ANY WAY.

3. COMMENT: BENHABYLES, AS USUAL, MADE PRESENTATION
IN VERY LOW KEY AND WAS APPARENTLY SEEKING TO PUT BEST
POSSIBLE FACE ON SITUATION. HIS REMARKS FOLLOWED
POSITIVE DISCUSSION BETWEEN UNDER SECRETARY ROBINSON
AND FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS RE NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE,
AND LUNCHEON EXCHANGE ON MIDDLE EAST, AND BENHABYLES
MAY HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO SOUR GOOD ATMOSPHERE WHICH
LATTER EXCHANGE HAD CREATED. ALTHOUGH BENHABYLES'
COLLEAGUES AT FOREIGN MINISTRY WERE ALSO FRIENDLY AND
RESTRAINED IN THEIR APPROACH, WE ARE NOT CONFIDENT
THAT ALGERIANS PLAN TO ALLOW DIFFICULTIES WHICH
SAHARA PROBLEM POSES FOR OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS TO
FADE. PARKER

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